

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 OSLO 1747

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SUBJ: NORWEGIAN LABOR PARTY SELECTION OF NEW LEADERS REFLECTS

PARTIAL SETBACK FOR MODERATES AND ACCELERATION OF
GENERATION SHIFT

REF: OSLO 1681

SUMMARY: THE NORWEGIAN LABOR PARTY CONVENTION CHOICE
THIS WEEK OF NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE COMING YEARS, WAS
A PARTIAL SETBACK FOR PARTY MODERATES AND AN ACCELERA-
TION OF THE GENERATION SHIFT. THE CONVENTION DECISION
TO DIVIDE THE MAJOR LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN
THE YOUTHFUL, LEFT-OF-CENTER RIEULF STEEN AS PARTY
CHAIRMAN AND THE MORE MODERN PARTY STORTING LEADER
ODVAR NORDLI AS PRIME MINISTER WHEN INCUMBENT TRYGVE
BRATTELI STEPS DOWN RESOLVED A HIGHLY DIVISIVE INTERNAL
QUESTION FOR THE PARTY AND MAY PAVE THE WAY FOR THE
UNITY THE PARTY NEEDS TO RECOUP SOME OF ITS STAGGERING
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LOSS OF VOTER SUPPORT OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS. BUT

THE COMPROMISE WAS GREETED MORE WITH RELIEF THAN EN-
THUSIASM FOR IT PAPERED OVER IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN LEFT-LEANING AND MORE CENTRIST ORIENTED GROUP-
INGS. IN SO DOING IT REFLECTS EVIDENT STRONG MAJORITY
SENTIMENT IN THE PARTY TO ADJUST TO THE DECISION AGAINST
COMMON MARKET MEMBERSHIP, LEAVE THE DIVISIVE ISSUE OF
EUROPEAN COOPERATION BEHIND AND MORE ON TO NEW ISSUES.

THERE ARE GOOD REASONS WHY STEEN WILL FIND IT
DIFFICULT AND UNWISE TO MORE VERY FAST IN PUTTING HIS
PERSONAL IMPRINT ON THE LABOR PARTY PROGRAM. AND INDEED
ON MAY KEY ISSUES, THE DIFFERENCES ARE MORE OF STYLE
THAN SUBSTANCE. OVER THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, THE
ENHANCED ROLE OF STEEN AND OF MORE YOUTHFUL LEADERS
IN THE LABOR PARTY WILL TEND TO FORMALIZE THE MORE
INWARD LOOKING VIEW OF NORWAY'S NATIONAL CONCERNS, AND
PARADOXICALLY MORE VOCAL SUPPORT FOR FASHIONABLE IN-
TERNATIONAL CAUSES INVOLVING PARTICULARLY THE THIRD
WORLD. THIS TREND COULD, IN TURN HAVE SOME UNFAVORABLE
SIDE EFFECTS ON OUR SECURITY INTERESTS IN NORWAY. HOWEVER, IF
BRATTELI IS REPLACED BY NORDLI WITHIN NEXT YEAR,
AS MANY HOPE, THIS COULD CHECK THE TENDENCY TO DRIFT
LEFTWARDS IN THE LABOR PARTY. END SUMMARY

1. WHILE NORDLI AND STEEN AGREE ON THE SAME PARTY
PLATFORM AND POLICY, THEY REPRESENT DIFFERENT APPROACHES
TO NORWAY'S SOCIAL DEMOCRACY. STEEN WOULD ACHIEVE THE
AGREED PARTY PLATFORM BY TAKING A SOMEWHAT MORE LEFT
OF CENTER COURSE THAN NORDLI WHO BELIEVES THE PARTY'S
FUTURE LIES MORE AT THE CENTER OF THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL
SPECTRUM. STEEN STRESSES PROGRESSIVE IDEALISM TO
"REUNIFY THE LABOR MOVEMENT" AND REGAIN VOTERS AND
SUPPORTERS LOST TO SV, WHILE NORDLI GIVES MORE STRESS
TO PRAGMATIC ISSUES TO REGAIN VOTERS LOST TO THE RIGHT.

2. STEEN, 42, SAYS HIS PARTY'S HEART IS ON THE LEFT.
A SKILLFUL ORATOR, HE IS A DOCTRINAIRE SOCIALIST WITH
A POLITICAL BASE ROOTED IN THE PARTY APPARATUS. HIS
SUPPORT IN THE PARTY CONVENTION CAME FROM THE FLOOR,
PARTICULARLY FROM THE YOUTH, INTELLECTUAL AND PRESS
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CIRCLES, UP-AND-COMING CABINET UNDERSECRETARIES AND
JUNIOR TRADE UNION OFFICERS AND THOSE TO THE LEFT OF
CENTER IN GENERAL. HE HAS RISEN THROUGH THE PARTY RANKS,
WAS SECRETARY OF THE YOUTH ORGANIZATION IN 1958 AND
SERVED AS SECRETARY OF THE PARTY'S PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
AND THEN AS MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS IN THE 1971-72
LABOR GOVERNMENT. HE HAS BEEN PARTY VICE CHAIRMAN FOR
THE PAST 10 YEARS.

3. NORDLI, 47, IS A FORMER PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTANT, HE WAS MINISTER OF LABOR AND MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS IN THE 1971-72 GOVERNMENT AND IS MODEST AND MODERATE, AND A PRAGMATIC AND EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY LEADER, DRAWING RESPECT AND SUPPORT FROM THE MORE MODERATE WING OF THE PARTY AND PARTICULARLY FROM ITS STRONG STORTING GROUP.

4. THE CONVENTION COMPROMISE WAS A SETBACK FOR NORDLI AND HIS BACKERS WHO WANTED HIM TO LEAD BOTH PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. NORDLI WAS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED AS THE BETTER PRIME MINISTER CANDIDATE. THE DIVISION OF CONVENTION SUPPORT BETWEEN THE TWO WAS ALMOST EVEN. BUT THE YOUNGER AND MORE ADAMANT BACKERS OF STEEN WOULD NOT YIELD TO A PROPOSAL FOR MORDLI AS CHAIRMAN, AND THEY FORCED THE COMPROMISE. THE COMPROMISE WAS ALSO A SETBACK FOR STEEN'S MORE MILITANT BACKERS WHO WANTED TO POSTPONE THE PRIME MINISTER DECISION UNTIL STEEN OR SOME OTHER MORE LEFT-LEANING SUCCESSOR TO BRATTELI COULD BE GROMMED. A BITTER FLOOR FIGHT PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE DAMAGING FOR NORDLI, THE PARTY, AND ITS LEADERSHIP, WHILE STEEN FELT THE HAD TO MAKE A DO OR DIE EFFORT OR BE ELIMINATED AS A LEADING INFLUENCE IN THE PARTY.

5. PERHAPS THE BIGGEST LOSER WAS TRADE UNION FEDERATION (LO) PRESIDENT TOR ASPENGREN, WHO DETERMINED TO BLOCK STEEN PROVED UNAVAILING. ASPENGREN, THE MOST POWERFUL FIGURE IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT, OR AT LEAST SECOND ONLY TO BRATELLI, AND LO'S OTHER TOP LEADERS HAVE BEEN UNHAPPY WITH STEEN AND WANTED EITHER NORDLI OR CHURCH AND EDUCATION MINISTER GJERDE AS CHAIRMAN. ASPENGREN'S CLOSE ASSOCIATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

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FOLLOWER, METALWORKERS UNION PRESIDENT LEIF SKAU WAS CHAIRMAN OF THE ELECTION COMMITTEE ON WHICH NORDLI BACKERS OUTNUMBERED STEEN 9 TO 5. IN THE END, HOWEVER, LABOR UNITY AND THE AVOIDANCE OF A POSSIBLE SPLIT PROVED EFFECTIVE IN CONSTRAINING ASPENGREN, NORDLI, BRATTELI AND OTHERS TO ACCEPT THE COMPROMISE GIVING STEEN THE BIRD IN THE HAND AND NORDLI THE ONE IN THE BUSH.

6. FOR BOTH NORDLI AND STEEN, THE FUTURE DEPENDS VERY MUCH ON WHEN BRATTELI DECIDES TO RELINQUISH THE JOB OF PRIME MINISTER, WHICH HE SEEMS TO ENJOY, PARTICULARLY NOW THAT THE LABOR PARTY POPULARITY SEEMS AGAIN TO BE ON THE RISE. BRATTELI NO SURPRISINGLY HAS REJECTED ANY DISCUSSION OF RETIREMENT DATES, AND NORDLI PRETENDS IN GOOD MODEST NORWEGIAN TRADITION THAT HE IS IN NO HURRY. BUT PRESSURE

ON BRATTELI TO STEP DOWN WELL BEFORE THE 1977 ELECTIONS
CAN ONLY GROW FROM MANY QUARTERS, BUT ESPECIALLY
FROM THE NATIONAL TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP.

7. NORDLI SUPPORTERS ARE CONCERNED THAT THE LONGER
BRATTELI REMAINS IN OFFICE, THE GREATER THE PRESSURE ON
STEEN ON THE PART OF HIS SUPPORTERS TO MAKE A BID TO
BECOME BRATTELI' SUCCESSOR, AND THE MORE TIME HE WILL
HAVE TO PUT HIS PERSONAL IMPRINT ON THE PARTY PROGRAM.
THOSE WHO DISTRUST STEEN'S JUDGEMENT WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIM
TEAM UP WITH IVAR LEVARAAS, NEWLY NAMED PARTY SECRETARY, AND
DEVELOP AN ACTIVE "GRASS ROOTS" PROGRAM REACHING OUT TO THE YOUTH
AND INTELLECTUAL GROUPS IN THE POPULAION, WHO HAVE TENDED TO BE
INDIFFERENT TO THE LAVOR PARTY. THEY FEEL HE CAN BE A VERY USEFUL
VOTE-GETTING SYMBOL--PROVIDED HE IS PREPARED TO
SUBORDINATE HIS VIEWS TO THE GENERAL PARTY LINE
DICTATED BY THE CABINET.

8. MANY LABOR PARTY PLIITICIANS WHO WOULD HAVE
PREFERRED NORDLI, BELIEVE THE PRESENT COMBINATION CAN
WORK, THEY STRESS THAT STEEN HAS ALWAYS BEEN A LOYAL
SUPPORTER OF NATO, AND INDEED WISHED NORWAY TO ENTER THE
EEC ON SECURITY GROUNDS. ANDEVEN IF STEEN HAS SHOWN
SURPRISING WILLINGNESS TO STAND UP AND FIGHT FOR POWER,
HE IS AN INSTINCTIVELY CAUTIOUS POLITICIAN BROUGHT UP
IN THE LABOR PARTY TRADITION OF COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING
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AND SELF-EFFACING LEADERSHIP. HE FINDS HIMSELF IN THE
POSITION OF HAVING TO BE AND EFFECTIVE SPOESMAN FOR
A POLICY WHICH WILL CONTINUE TO BE FORMULATED BY A
MODERATE CABINER, REINFORCED BY THE ELECTION OF A
YOUNGER BUT GENERALLY MODERATE CENTRAL COMMITTEE.
HE HAS IN IVAR LEVERAAS NEWLY NAMED PARTY SECRETARY,
LINKS TO MINISTER BJARTMAR GJERDE, WHO COULD CHALLENGE
STEEN FOR CONTROL OF THE LABOR PARTY

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APPARATUS. FINALLY, STEEN IS PROBABLY A REALISTIC ENOUGH POLITICIAN TO KNOW THAT HE MUST OVERCOME THE WIDE-SPREAD DISTRUST OF HIS JUDGEMENT AMONG LEADING LABOR PARTY POLITICIANS AND WIDE SECTIONS OF THE ELECTORATE, BY PLAY HIS CARDS VERY CAREFULLY, IF HE IS TO ADVANCE HIS POLITICAL FORTUNES, AND CERTAINLY IF HE HOPES TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER ONE DAY. WHEN ASKED WHETHER HE FEELS HE HAS LOST ALL CHANCE TO BECOME P.M., HE COMMENTED SIGNIFICANTLY THAT HE IS STILL ONLY 42.

9. STEEN'S BEST OPPORTUNITY TO PUT HIS PERSONAL IMPRINT ON THE PARTY PROGRAM WILL COME EARLY NEXT YEAR WHEN THE VARIOUS LABOR PARTY COMMITTEES, WHICH MEET IRREGULARLY (ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, INDUSTRIAL POLICY , ETC) BEGIN TO WORK SERIOUSLY TO PRODUCE THE PROGRAM ON WHICH THE PARTY WILL RUN IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 1977. HERE STEEN WILL HAVE AN ADVANTAGE OVER NORDLI BECAUSE OF HIS GREATER ABILITY TO CONCEPTUALIZE AND ARTICULATE AN INTEGRAL PROGRAM IN STIRRING LANGUAGE. NOT THAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO MEN ARE SO CONFIDENTIAL

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VERY GREAT, BUT STEEN TENDS TO BE MORE INCLINED TO SPEAK OUT ON BEHALF OF UNDERDOG CAUSES, THIRD WORLD LIBERATION MOVEMENTS, FOREIGN AID, EAST-WEST AND NORTH-SOUTH BRIDGE BUILDING, CONTROL OVER THE EXCESSES OF UNGUIDED CAPITALISM ANDM OTHER ISSUES THAT APPEAL TO YOUTH. EVEN HERE STEEN WILL REMAIN IN GOOD PART PRISONER OF THEEXISTING POLICY, FOR THE LABOR PARTY MUST INEVITABLY RUM ON THE PROGRAM FORMULATED BY ITS

MINORITY GOVERNMENT, NOT ONLY IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS THIS YEAR BUT ALSO TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE THROUGH THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. IF HE SHOULD INTRODUCE CHANGES IN THE PROGRAM, THEREFORE, THE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ONES OF EMPHASIS AND DEGREE THAN OF SUBSTANCE.

10. THE LEADERSHIP ISSUE SO DOMINATED THE CONVENTION THAT THERE WAS ONLY BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE PARTY'S FUTURE PROGRAM, INCONTRAST TO 1973 WHEN FUNDAMENTAL NATIONAL POLICY LINES WERE ESTABLISHED AT THE CONVENTION. WITH PRIVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IMMINENT, THIS YEAR'S UPDATING OF THE PARTY PROGRAM FOCUSSED ON LOCAL AND ORGANIZATION ISSUES.

11. AT THE ELECTION COMMITTEE'S SUGGESTION, THE CONVENTION DECIDED AGAINST USUAL PRACTICE OF ELECTING A NEW EDITOR OF THE INFLUENTIAL OSLO LABOR NEWSPAPER ARBEIDERBLADET. INSTEAD IT AUTHORIZED THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, IN COOPERATION WITH THE PAPER'S EDITORIAL BOARD, TO SELECT A NEW EDITOR AND TO DRAW UP AMENDMENTS TO THE PARTY BY-LAWS PROVIDING FOR FUTURE SELECTION OF THE EDITOR, FOR APPROVAL IN THE 1977 CONVENTION. LEADING CANDIDATE MENTIONED FOR THE EDITOR JOB IS STAVANGER EDITOR PER BRUNVAND, A STEEN SUPPORTER. OTHER POSSIBILITIES, BOTH MORE CLSELY IDENTIFIED WITH NORDLI, ARE CHURCH AND EDUCATION MINISTER BJERDE AND KONGSVINGER EDITOR AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBER EGIL TORENG.

12. THE FOREIGN POLICY STATEMENT ADOPTED CALLED FOR NO CHANGES IN NORWAY'S POLICY, AND IT WAS REASSURING TO SEE THAT NEITHER NORWAY'S SUPPORT OF NATO NOR CLOSE TIES WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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THE U.S. WERE ISSUES AT THE CONVENTION. MOREOVER, THE CONVENTION SUPPORTED NORWAY'S ASSOCIATION WITH THE IEA. A BURST OF ENTHUSIASM IN THE FOREIGN POLICY FIELD CAME WITH THE FIVE-MINUTE RHYTHMIC OVATION AT BRATTELI'S ENNOUNCEMENT OF RVN PRESIDENT THIEU'S RESIGNATION. FOREIGN MINISTER FYRDENLUND MANAGED TO STALL ANY RADICAL INITIATIVE INVOLVING CAMBODIA OR THE PRG BY PROMISING TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION WITH THE STORTING (OSLO 1783). THE CONVENTION ALSO URGED NORWEGIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF VIETNAM, DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IS SOLVING ECONOMIC CRISES AND SOLIDARITY WITH PORTUGAL'S SOCIALIST PARTY AND CHILEAN SOCIALISM.

13. SOME OF THE MORE PARTISAN SUPPORTERS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE COMPROMISE, BUT MOST OF THE LEADERS AND RANK

AND FILE HAVE CLOSED RANKS IN SUPPORT OF THE CONVENTION'S DECISION. THEY ARE RELIEVED THAT THE QUESTION WAS RESOLVED WITHOUT AN OPEN SPLIT AND ARE ENTHUSIASTIC AT THE PROSPECT OF RENEWED UNITY. THE EMPHASIS ON YOUTH AND WOMEN IN THE CONVENTION'S SELECTION HAS GENERATED ENTHUSIASM. THE SELECTION OF THE CAPABLE AND POPULAR ENVIRONMENT MINISTER MRS. GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND, 36, AS LABOR'S FIRST WOMAN VICE CHAIRMAN AND OF 35-YEAR-OLDS LEVERAAS AS PARTY SECRETARY WERE ILLUSTRATIVE. OF THE 18- MEMBER CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND STAND-INS, OVER HALF OF THE NEW MEMBERS ARE YOUNG PEOPLE; TWO OF THE THREE CHANGES MADE IN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE SLATE FROM THE CONVENTION FLOOR REPLACED MALE NOMINEES WITH YOUNG WOMEN.

14. THE FACT THAT THE LEADERSHIP CHANGE WAS ACHIEVED WITHOUT OPEN CONFLICT WAS CLEARLY A PLUS FOR THE LABOR PARTY IN ITS RELATIONS WITH ALL ITS RIVALS. THE SELECTION OF STEEN, HOWEVER, WILL HAVE A MIXED IMPACT ON THE PARTY FORTUNES. STEEN'S LEFT-OF-CENTER IMAGE MAY MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE SOCIALIST LEFT PARTY (SV) TO RAIL PERSUASIVELY AGAINST LABOR, AND MAY EVEN HELP LABOR MAKE SOME INROADS INTO SV'S VOTER SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY IF FRICTION DEVELOPS WITH THE COMMUNISTS WITHIN THE SV COALITION. LABOR IS PLAYING FOR SUCH A SPLIT BY EMPHASIZING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENUINE
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DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM, IF HOWEVER, STEEN SUCCESSFULLY APPEALS TO SV VOTERS, SV LEADERS MAY FIND IT NECESSARY TO ATTACK HIM AND LABOR AGGRESSIVELY.

15. ON THE OTHER HAND, LABOR SUPPORT FROM THE NON-SOCIALISTS IS LIKELY TO BE DIMINISHED UNDER STEEN. THE MOOD AT THE LABOR PARTY CONVENTION WAS OPPOSED TO COOPERATION OR ASSOCIATION WITH THE NON-SOCIALIST PARTIES IN THE CENTER. THE CONSERVATIVES, IN TURN, WERE DELIGHTED TO BE ABLE TO USE THE PRESENCE OF STEEN AS PARTY CHAIRMAN AS AN ADDED ARGUMENT AGAINST COOPERATION WITH LABOR AND FOR THE EARLY ESTABLISHMENT OF A NON-SOCIALIST COALITION. THUS, THE PROSPECTS THAT LABOR AND THE CENTER PARTIES MIGHT COLLABORATE IN FUTURE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SET BACK.

16. THE MOST DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ANSWER IS WHAT STEEN'S ELECTION MAY MEAN FOR U.S. INTEREST, IN NORWAY. DIRE PREDICTIONS BY THE NON-SOCIALIST PRESS THAT NORWAY'S BASIC DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND ITS WESTERN ORIENTATION ARE IN MORTAL DANGER ARE OBVIOUS PARTISAN HYPERBOLE. IT DOES SEEM PROBABLE ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT THE CHOICE

OF STEEN AND THE INFUSION OF MORE YOUNGER LABORERS
INTO THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP WILL LEAD IN TIME TO A
SLIGHT SHIFT IN EMPHASIS, AND TO A STRENGTHENING OF
TWO SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY TRENDS IN NORWAY TODAY--
TOWARD A MORE ASSERTIVE, NATIONALIST OUTLOOK DOWNPLAYING
ALLIED SOLIDARITY AND, AT THE SAME TIME, AN INTERNATIONAL-
IST CONCERN WITH ISSUES LIKE THE ENVIRONMENT, THIRD WORLD
INTERESTS AND INCREASED EAST-WEST EXCHANGES. FORTUNATELY,
SOME OF THE MOST BITTER ISSUES LIKE VIETNAM WHICH
PROVOKED ACUTE ANTI-AMERICAN FEELINGS AMONG THE YOUTH
ARE FADING IN IMPORTANCE. NORDBLIS EARLY ASSUMPTION
OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION COULD SERVE, OF COURSE,
TO MODERATE ANY SHIFTS IN EMPHASIS. OUR RELATIONS WITH
NORWAY WILL ALSO BE AFFECTED BY OUR OWN ABILITY TO
DEVELOP A DIALOGUE WITH THE NEW ELEMENTS IN THE LABOR
PARTY, IDENTIFYING ISSUES OF COMMON CONCERN IN PLACE
OF ISSUES OF CONFRONTATION WHICH HAVE HELD CENTER STAGE
IN RECENT YEARS.

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